

do. We should do it now. That is why we are so eager to get 10 Republicans to support the bill.

And across the street from here, we have all heard Justice Clarence Thomas and his fellow MAGA Republican Justices are surely waiting for the chance to one day follow through on his threat—Justice Thomas's threat to drag same-sex marriage rights back under the spotlight of the Supreme Court. That thought should send a shiver down all of our spines.

So I want to thank my colleagues, from Senators BALDWIN to SINEMA to COLLINS and others, for continuing their talks. I am glad to give them the space to lead these negotiations because this needs to be done and done right. But for the sake of tens of millions of Americans, we need to get this done, and I hope we have 10 Republicans who are willing to raise their hands and push this process forward.

JUDICIAL NOMINATIONS

Madam President, finally on judges, it was another productive week here on the Senate floor when it comes to confirming more judicial nominees. On Monday, we completed the confirmation process for Salvador Mendoza to sit on the Ninth Circuit. Then we confirmed Lara Montecalvo to sit on the First Circuit. And later this morning, we will vote to confirm Sarah Merriam to be on the Second Circuit.

We also will return to the nomination of Arianna Freeman to the Third Circuit as soon as possible.

That brings our total for the month of September to five circuit court judges, and we now have confirmed more than 80 judicial nominees to the Federal bench. On numerous occasions, it has been with bipartisan votes, and I want to thank my Republican colleague who joined us in voting for these fine nominees.

To the Committee on the Judiciary, Senator DURBIN, and all of my colleagues, I say great work. Let's keep going.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Republican leader is recognized.

INFLATION

Mr. MCCONNELL. This week's inflation report confirmed what working people across this country know all too well: The costs of feeding a family and keeping the lights on have skyrocketed more quickly this past year than at any time since the wake of the Carter administration.

A year and a half of crippling runaway inflation is the most important

story to the American people every single day. The media have grown somewhat numb to month after month of 8 and 9 percent inflation, but working Americans have not had the luxury of growing numb. The pain gets worse every single time they have to fill a shopping cart or pay their credit card bill.

One mother of young sons in my hometown of Louisville put it this way:

My grocery bill has [gone] up a lot. It's terrible right now. I have to be really strategic on how I plan out the whole month to make sure we have enough money.

Of course, Kentuckians aren't the only ones in this predicament. In Nevada, an office worker recently told reporters:

I've not been buying a lot of things because I can't afford it. I'm like, "The kids don't need juice for school anymore. We'll just do water."

In Arizona, so many families are having to make tough choices at the grocery store, many are accepting charity to keep food on the table.

According to an employee of one food bank in Phoenix:

The impact we are seeing day in and day out continues to go up. The families are stressed.

And who can blame them? Food inflation in America is at more than a four-decade high. Bread is 16.2 percent more expensive than it was a year ago. Milk is up 17 percent. Flour is up 23.3 percent, and eggs are going for nearly 40 percent more.

Week after week, feeding a family has become a stressful proposition for millions of Americans, and every extra dollar spent on groceries is one fewer to spare for soaring electricity bills.

In the suburbs of Las Vegas, residents have commiserated over the astronomical cost of keeping their homes cool in the summer. One neighborhood message board reads like this:

My bill for this month will be \$574 . . . it's insane.

Yes, ours was \$800 for June.

In Arizona, a restaurant worker didn't mince words about scraping together enough to keep the lights and air-conditioning on:

If I didn't have roommates, I wouldn't be able to make it on the salary that I have.

Overall, inflation in Phoenix and Atlanta is way, way higher than even the sky-high national average. The country as a whole is still grappling with inflation over 8 percent, but Phoenix has seen a staggering 13 percent inflation in just the last year, and Atlanta has seen nearly 12 percent.

Of course, for working Americans in some other States, the most acute emergency is not the cost of summer cooling but, rather, the cost of winter heating.

In places like New Hampshire and Vermont where many homes burn heating oil, this important price is up more than 91 percent since President Biden took office.

And in every corner of the country, one of the biggest collective headaches

facing working families with young kids is the rising cost of back-to-school shopping lists.

According to one working mother in Pennsylvania, she had to take items like a backpack for her preschooler out of her shopping cart in the checkout line:

It's been at least 20 years since I have had to pull back to this extent. This is a new and humbling experience for me as an adult.

American families are facing math problems that just don't add up.

Meanwhile, the same Washington Democrats who got them into this mess spent Tuesday celebrating having rammed through, on a party-line vote, a bill that does nothing to help them solve it: hundreds of billions of dollars in new spending, just as working families are having the hardest time in decades making ends meet at home; hundreds of billions of taxpayer dollars that wouldn't even accomplish Democrats' own underlying radical climate goals, let alone the false claims of "inflation reduction" on the cover.

So our economy continues to hand working families a raw deal. But the same day this latest awful inflation report was published, Washington Democrats went to a concert at the White House and celebrated—celebrated—their economic policies.

How much more out of touch can you get?

The Democrats' giant inflationary spiral is costing the average American household 460 extra dollars every single month just to buy the same things they bought last year. President Biden and his government have imposed a silent Democratic inflation tax of \$460 every single month.

In Kentucky, the average household has to pay \$608 more a month—well over \$7,000 more a year—just to stay where they were when President Biden was sworn in.

Americans' real wages—their purchasing power—has plummeted since this all-Democratic government was sworn in.

And the Democrats response? Print and spend hundreds of billions more, make Americans without bachelor's degrees pay off the graduate school debt of doctors and lawyers, and throw themselves a party on the White House lawn.

Our colleagues across the aisle created this human catastrophe. This runaway inflation was a policy choice by Democrats, and they aren't even trying to stop it.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

INFLATION REDUCTION ACT OF 2022

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, the August inflation numbers came out

this week, and they weren't good. Inflation was even higher than expected. It was very clear that soaring prices are likely to continue for quite a while, but as usual, it doesn't seem to concern the Democrats one bit.

The President was asked Tuesday if he was concerned about August's even-worse-than-expected inflation report.

His answer? "No, I'm not."

It was just one more tone-deaf moment for the President and the Democrats.

On Tuesday, the President and the Democrats gathered at the White House to congratulate themselves for having passed their so-called Inflation Reduction Act, a bill that will do nothing—nothing—to reduce inflation. That is not just my opinion. That was the conclusion of the nonpartisan Penn Wharton Budget Model and of the Democrat chairman of the Senate Budget Committee, who referred to the bill as the "so-called Inflation Reduction Act" on the Senate floor while admitting it would do nothing to solve our Nation's inflation crisis.

But that didn't stop the Democrats from celebrating yesterday. For most of us, of course, it is difficult to understand what there was to celebrate. Leaving aside the issue of the 40-year-high inflation, we already know that the bill will also fall short in another respect—on deficit reduction.

The Democrats' claims that the bill would provide meaningful deficit reduction were always somewhat dubious, but even granting the Democrats' rosier assumptions, President Biden wiped out any deficit reduction when he announced his massive student loan giveaway 8 days—8 days—after the Inflation Reduction Act was signed into law.

So no inflation reduction, no deficit reduction. Oh, one other thing: The Inflation Reduction Act will drive up energy bills for Americans.

So the question is: What was there to celebrate?

Well, for the Democrats, the Inflation Reduction Act marked a chance to finally push through some of their far-left, Green New Deal fantasies, things like electric vehicle tax credits to help wealthy Americans buy electric cars, more than \$60 billion—\$60 billion—for "environmental justice priorities," including \$1.9 billion for things like identifying gaps in tree canopy coverage, and the list goes on. So I think the Democrats are pretty satisfied with themselves over finally jamming through elements of their Green New Deal agenda.

Then, of course, they succeeded in extending increased ObamaCare subsidies that will push Americans off of private healthcare plans and into government-run care.

Then—then—there are the tax hikes. The current Democratic leader once said, "You don't want to take money out of the economy when the economy is shrinking," like it has in the previous two quarters. But those days are

gone. For the Democrats, raising taxes has become an article of faith.

And it goes far beyond raising money to help pay for their Big Government spending. The Democrats believe raising taxes on corporations and well-off Americans is good in and of itself, even if those tax hikes have a negative effect on less well-off Americans and the economy. The tax hikes that the Democrats have included in their so-called Inflation Reduction Act will, indeed, have a negative effect on our economy and on the hard-working Americans who help support it. The Democrats' tax hikes on businesses will result in slower growth, lower wages, and thousands of fewer jobs, and the Democrats' tax hikes on conventional energy will result in higher energy prices for working families.

In addition to raising taxes, the other main way the Inflation Reduction Act raises revenue is by increasing IRS audits and placing new burdens on taxpayers.

The Democrats' bill contains a whopping \$80 billion in increased funding for the IRS. That is an increase in funding which represents six times the annual budget of the IRS today. More than half of those funds, or \$46 billion, are earmarked for increased IRS enforcement. Just 4 percent is for improving customer service, which should tell you all you need to know about where the Democrats' real priorities lie.

The bill would provide for the hiring of as many as 87,000 new employees, which would more than double the current size of the Agency and make the IRS—make the IRS, if you can believe this—larger than Customs and Border Protection and the U.S. Coast Guard put together, combined.

In the lead-up to the passage of the Democrats' bill, the Biden administration put out a statement declaring that the money for IRS enforcement would not go to the increased audits of households making less than \$400,000. Because we had reason to doubt that that would be the case, the Republicans put forward an amendment to the bill to prevent the IRS from using its new money to audit those Americans. Every Democrat—every single Democrat—voted against the amendment. So, I guess, the Democrats are happy to oppose more IRS audits of middle-class Americans in theory, but they don't want to cut off the possibility of those audits in practice if they end up needing them to help fund their Green New Deal spending.

I don't need to tell anyone that the IRS is notorious for mishandling sensitive taxpayer data. As recently as this month, we learned that the IRS had inadvertently posted confidential taxpayer data of around 120,000 individuals on its website—private taxpayer information that was available to the general public.

Then, of course, there was last year's leak, or hack, of confidential taxpayer information that was shared with the left-leaning ProPublica and was used

to advance a partisan agenda for which, I might add, neither the IRS nor the Biden administration has provided any accountability.

Then there was the infamous targeting of conservative groups for extra scrutiny under the Obama IRS, and the list goes on.

I haven't even discussed the IRS's record of grossly underperforming—some would say nonexistent—customer service. During the 2022 tax season, just 10 percent of taxpayers' calls—10 percent of taxpayers' calls—to the IRS were answered by an IRS employee. What we need to be doing is holding the IRS accountable, not setting tens of thousands of new IRS agents loose on taxpayers' accounts.

Earlier this week, I joined my Republican colleagues on the Senate Finance Committee to introduce legislation to prevent the IRS from using its new funding to audit American workers or small business owners earning less than \$400,000 per year.

I also introduced a bill this week, along with Senator COLLINS, to improve taxpayer service at the IRS. Our legislation, called the Increase Reliable Services Now Act, would prevent the IRS from hiring new employees for enforcement until customer service at the IRS had reached a more acceptable level. It is unacceptable—unacceptable—that taxpayers have a 1 in 10 chance of receiving assistance when calling the IRS, and the Agency should not be allowed to increase enforcement hires until it has achieved at least a basic level of customer service.

So we have 87,000 new employees, which is double—double—the size of the current IRS workforce, and we have \$80 billion, which is six times the current annual budget of the IRS, with a specific focus: going after taxpayers in this country to try and get, raise—whatever—more revenue to fund the Democrats' Big Government fantasies. At the same time, 1 in 10 taxpayers is getting his calls returned at the IRS.

I will continue to work to increase IRS accountability and prevent hard-working Americans from being squeezed to fund Democrats' Green New Deal spending.

Like the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan spending spree that came before it—which, I would add, helped plunge our country into our current inflation crisis—the Inflation Reduction Act is a bad deal for the American people, and all of the self-congratulatory White House parties in the world aren't going to change that basic fundamental fact.

Americans are experiencing serious economic hardship, and Democrats are doing nothing to help.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MARKEY). The Senator from Iowa.

RAILWAY LABOR MANAGEMENT DISPUTE

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, as of 12:01 tomorrow morning, our Nation's transportation system was set to come to a screeching halt. It now sounds like